

Is This Humanity?

M. K. Gandhi

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Prologue: Knotty problems of non-violence

The destruction of certain dogs by a millowner, when some of them were suffering from hydrophobia and when there was danger of the employees being bitten any moment has angered members of the very influential Jain community of Ahmedabad. Having many friends among them and being regarded by many as an authority in matters of ahimsa (non-violence), I have been helplessly and reluctantly drawn into the controversy. As the matter has gone beyond the mere Gujarati-speaking public of Ahmedabad, I am presenting the readers of *Young India* with a translation of the series of articles I am devoting to the subject covering as far as possible the whole wide field of ahimsa. I have no doubt that many readers of *Young India* who are interested in the theory and evolution of non-violence will welcome the translation of the series.

Young India, 21-10-1926

I

The Ahmedabad Humanitarian League has addressed me a letter from which I take the relevant portions:

The talk of the whole city of Ahmedabad is the destruction of 60 dogs on his mill premises at the instance of Seth. . . Many a humanitarian heart is considerably agitated over the incident. When Hinduism forbids the taking of the life of any living being, when it declares it to be a sin, do you think it right to kill rabid dogs for the reason that they would bite human beings and by biting other dogs make them also rabid? Are not the man who actually destroys the dogs as also the man at whose instance he does so both sinners?

A deputation of three gentlemen from our Society waited on the Seth on the 28th ultimo. He confessed in the course of the interview that he had to take the course in question to save human life. He also said: "I myself had no sleep on the

night I took that decision. I met Mahatmaji the next morning and ascertained his view in the matter. He said, 'What else could be done?' Is that a fact? And if so, what does it mean?

We hope you will express your views in the matter and set the whole controversy at rest and prevent humanitarianism from being endangered by the shocks given to it by distinguished men like the Seth. The Ahmedabad Municipality, we have heard, is soon going to have before it a resolution for the castration of stray dogs. Is it proper? Does religion sanction the castration of an animal? We should be thankful if you would give your opinion in this matter also.

Ahmedabad knows the name of the mill-owner, but as *Navajivan* is being read outside Ahmedabad also, I have omitted to mention his name in accordance with my practice to avoid personalities whilst discussing a principle. The question raised by the Humanitarian Society is an intricate one. I had been thinking of discussing the question ever since and even before the incident, but on second thought dropped the idea. But the letter of the Society now compels me, makes it my duty, to enter into a public discussion of the question.

I must say that my relations with the mill-owner have been sweet, and, if I may say so, friendly. He came to me and expressed his distress in having had to order destruction of the dogs, and asked my opinion about it. He also said: "When the Government, the Municipality and the Mahajan [mercantile guild] all alike failed to guide me, I was driven to this course." I gave him the reply that the Society's letter attributes to me.

I have since thought over the matter and feel that my reply was quite proper.

Imperfect, erring mortals as we are, there is no course open to us but the destruction of rabid dogs. At times we may be faced with the unavoidable duty of killing a man who is found in the act of killing people. If we persist in keeping stray dogs undisturbed, we shall soon be faced with the duty of either castrating them or killing them. A third alternative is that of having a special pinjrapole [shelter] for dogs. But it is out of the question. When we cannot cope with all the stray cattle in the city, the very proposal of having a pinjrapole for dogs seems to me to be chimerical.

There can be no two opinions on the fact that Hinduism regards killing a living being as sinful. I think all religions are agreed on the principle. There is generally no difficulty in determining a principle. The difficulty comes in when one proceeds to put it into practice. A principle is the expression of a perfection, and as imperfect beings like us cannot practise perfection, we devise every moment limits of its compromise in practice. So Hinduism has laid down that killing for sacrifice is no *himsa* (violence). This is only a half-truth. Violence will be violence for all time, and all violence is sinful. But what is inevitable is not regarded as a sin, so much so that the science of daily practice has not only declared the inevitable violence involved in killing for sacrifice as permissible, but even regarded it as meritorious.

But unavoidable violence cannot be defined. For it changes with time, place and person. What is regarded as excusable at one time may be inexcusable at another. The violence involved in burning fuel or coal in the depth of winter to keep the body warm may be unavoidable and, therefore, a duty for weak-bodied man, but fire unnecessarily lit in midsummer is clearly violence.

We recognize the duty of killing microbes by the use of disinfectants. It is violence and yet a duty. But why go even as far as that? The air in a dark, closed room is full of little microbes, and the introduction of light and air into it by opening it is destruction indeed. But it is ever a duty to use that finest of disinfectants—pure air.

These instances can be multiplied. The principle that applies in the instances cited applies in the matter of killing rabid dogs. To destroy a rabid dog is to commit the minimum amount of violence. A recluse, who is living in a forest and is compassion incarnate, may not destroy a rabid dog. For in his compassion he has the virtue of making it whole. But a city-dweller who is responsible for the protection of lives under his care and who does not possess the virtues of the recluse, but is capable of destroying a rabid dog, is faced with a conflict of duties. If he kills the dog, he commits a sin. If he does not kill it, he commits a graver sin. So he prefers to commit the lesser one and save himself from the graver.

I believe myself to be saturated with ahimsa-non-violence. Ahimsa and Truth are as my two lungs. I cannot live without them. But I see every moment, with more and more clearness, the immense power of ahimsa and the littleness of man. Even the forest-dweller cannot be entirely free from violence, in spite of his limitless compassion. With every breath he commits a certain amount of violence. The body itself is a house of slaughter, and therefore moksha and Eternal Bliss consist in perfect deliverance from the body and, therefore, all pleasure, save the joy of moksha, is evanescent, imperfect.

That being the case, we have to drink, in daily life, many a bitter draught of violence.

It is therefore a thousand pities that the question of stray dogs, etc., assumes such a monstrous proportion in this sacred land of ahimsa. It is my firm conviction that we are propagating *himsa* in the name of ahimsa owing to our deep ignorance of the great principle. It may be a sin to destroy rabid dogs and such others as are liable to catch rabies. But we are responsible, the mahajan is responsible, for this state of things. The mahajan may not allow the dogs to stray. It is a sin, it should be a sin, to feed stray dogs, and we should save numerous dogs if we had legislation making every stray dog liable to be shot. Even if those who feed stray dogs consented to pay a penalty for their misdirected compassion we should be free from the curse of stray dogs.

Humanity is a noble attribute of the soul. It is not exhausted with saving a few fish or a few dogs. Such saving may even be sinful. If I have a swarm of ants in my house, the man who proceeds to feed them will be guilty of a sin. For God has provided their grain for the ants, but the man who feeds them might destroy me and my family. The mahajan may feel itself safe and believe that it has saved their lives by dumping dogs near my field, but it will have committed the greater sin of putting my life in danger. Humaneness is impossible without thought, discrimination, charity, fearlessness, humility and clear vision. It is no easy thing to walk on the sharp sword-edge of ahimsa in this world which is so full of *himsa*. Wealth does not help; anger is the enemy of ahimsa; and pride is a monster that swallows it up. In this strait and narrow observance of this religion of ahimsa one has often to know so-called *himsa* as the truest form of ahimsa.

Things in this world are not what they seem and do not seem as they really are. Or if they are seen as they are, they so appear only to a few who have perfected themselves after ages of penance. But none has yet been able to describe the reality, and no one can.

II

When I wrote the article on this subject I knew that I was adding one more to my already heavy burden of troubles. But it could not be helped.

Angry letters are now pouring in. At an hour when after a hard day's work I was about to retire to bed, three friends invaded me, infringed the religion of ahimsa in the name of humanity, and engaged me in a discussion on it. They had come in the name of humanity. How could I refuse to see them?

So I met them. One of them, I saw, betrayed anger, bitterness and arrogance. He did not seem to me to have come with a view to getting his doubts solved. He had come rather to correct me. Everyone has a right to do so, but whoever undertakes such a mission must know my position. This friend had taken no trouble to understand my position. But he was not to blame for it. This impatience which is but a symptom of violence is to be found everywhere. The violence in this case was painful to me as it was betrayed by an advocate of non-violence.

He claimed to be a Jain. I have made a fair study of Jainism. This visitor's ahimsa was a distortion of the reality as I have known it in Jainism. But the Jains have no monopoly of ahimsa. It is not the exclusive peculiarity of any religion. Every religion is based on ahimsa, its application is different in different religions.

I do not think that the Jains of today practise ahimsa in any better way than others. I can say this because of my acquaintance with Jains, which is so old that many take me to be a Jain. Mahavir was an incarnation of compassion, of ahimsa. How I wish his votaries were votaries also of his ahimsa!

Protection of little creatures is indeed an essential part of ahimsa, but it does not exhaust itself with it. Ahimsa begins with it. Besides protection may not always mean mere refraining from killing. Torture or participation, direct or indirect, in the unnecessary multiplication of those that must die is *himsa*.

The multiplication of dogs is unnecessary. A roving dog without an owner is a danger to society and a swarm of them is a menace to its very existence.

If we want to keep dogs in towns or villages in a decent manner, no dog should be suffered to wander. There should be no stray dogs even as we have no stray cattle. Humanitarian societies should find a religious solution of such questions.

But can we take individual charge of these roving dogs? And if we cannot, can we have a panjrapol for them? If both these things are impossible, there seems to me to be no alternative except to kill them.

Connivance or putting up with the status quo is no ahimsa, there is no thought or discrimination in it. Dogs will be killed whenever they are a menace to society. I regard this as unavoidable in the life of a householder. To wait until they get rabid is not to be merciful to them. We can imagine what the dogs would wish if a meeting could be called of them, from what we would wish under the same circumstances. We will not choose to live anyhow. That many of us do so is no credit to us. A meeting of wise men will never resolve that men may treat one another as they treat rabid or stray dogs. What shall we expect of them if there were

to be some beings lording it over us as we do over dogs? Would we not rather prefer to be killed than to be treated as dogs? We offend against dogs as a class by suffering them to stray and live on crumbs or savings from our plates that we throw at them and we injure our neighbours also by doing so.

I admit that there is the duty of suffering dogs to live even at the cost of one's life. But that religion is not for the householder who desires to live, who procreates, who would protect society. The householder can but practise the middle path of taking care of a few dogs.

Our domestics of today are the wild animals of yesterday. The buffalo is a domestic only in India. It is a sin to domesticate wild animals inasmuch as man does so for his selfish purposes. That he has domesticated the cow and the buffalo is not out of mercy for them, it is for his own use. He, therefore, does not allow a cow or a buffalo to stray. The same duty is incumbent regarding dogs. I am, therefore, strongly of opinion that, if we would practise the religion of humanity, we should have a law making it obligatory on those who would have dogs to keep them under guard, and not allow them to stray, and making all the stray dogs liable to be destroyed after a certain date.

If the mahajan has really any mercy for the dogs, it should take possession of all the stray dogs and distribute them to those who want to keep them. It seems to me to be impossible to protect dogs as we can protect the cows.

But there is a regular science of dog-keeping which the people in the West have formulated and perfected. We should learn it from them and devise measures for the solution of our own problem. The work cannot be done without patience, wisdom and perseverance.

So much about dogs. But with ahimsa in its comprehensive aspect I propose to deal on another occasion.

Young India, 28-10-1926

III

Whilst I admit the possibility of having made a mistake in giving the opinion that the destruction by Mr. Ambalal's order of sixty dogs was unavoidable, I do not regret having expressed that opinion. The result so far is all to the good. We shall perhaps now understand more clearly our duty to such animals. Much wrong has been done partly out of ignorance, partly from hypocrisy and partly for fear of public opinion. All that should now cease.

But if the good is to be maintained, a clear understanding is necessary between the readers and myself. I have received quite a pile of letters on the subject, some friendly, some sharp and some bitter. They do not seem to have understood my attitude on the destruction of dogs by Mr. Ambalal. I have often had the misfortune to be misunderstood. In South Africa my life was in peril over an action which was quite consistent with my avowed principles but which, as was proved later, was rashly regarded as contrary to them. The so-called "Himalayan blunder" of Bardoli is a recent memory. The Bombay Government very kindly imprisoned me at Yeravda and saved me the trouble of much writing by way of explaining and clearing my position. The Bardoli decision, I still hold, was not wrong. It was, on the

contrary, an act of purest ahimsa and of invaluable service to the country. I feel just as clear about my opinion regarding the present question. I hold that the opinion is perfectly in accord with my conception of ahimsa.

The critics, whether friendly or hostile, should bear with me. Some of the hostile critics have transgressed the limits of decorum. They have made no attempt to understand my position. It seems they cannot for a moment tolerate my opinion. Now they must be one of two things. They are either my teachers or they regard me as one. In the latter case, they should be courteous and patient and should have faith in me and ponder over what I write. In the former case, they should be indulgent to me and try to reason with me as lovingly and patiently as they can. I teach the children under my care not by being angry with them, but I teach them, if at all, by loving them, by allowing for their ignorance, and by playing with them. I expect the same love, the same consideration and the same sportsmanlike spirit from my angry teachers. I have given my opinion with regard to the dogs with the best of motives and as a matter of duty. If I am mistaken, let the critics who would teach me reason with me patiently and logically. Angry and irrelevant argument will not convince me.

A gentleman called on me the other evening at a late hour. He knew that my time was completely occupied. He engaged me in a discussion, used hard and bitter language, and poured vials of wrath on me. I answered his questions in good humour and politely. He has published the interview in a leaflet which he is selling. It is before me. It has crossed the limits of truth, obviously of decorum. He had neither obtained my permission to publish the interview nor showed it to me before publication. Does he seek to teach me in this manner? He who trifles with truth cuts at the root of ahimsa. He who is angry is guilty of *himsa*. How can such a man teach me ahimsa?

Even so the hostile critics are doing me a service. They teach me to examine myself. They afford me an opportunity to see if I am free from the reaction of anger. And when I go to the root of their anger, I find nothing but love. They have attributed to me ahimsa as they understand it. Now they find me acting in a contrary manner and are angry with me. They once regarded me as a mahatma, they were glad that my influence on the people was according to their liking. Now I am an alpatma (a little soul) in their opinion; my influence on the people they now regard as unwholesome and they are pained by the discovery; and as they cannot control themselves, they turn the feeling of pain into one of anger.

I do not mind this outburst of anger, as I appreciate the motive behind it. I must try to reason with them patiently, and if they would help me in my attempt, I request them to calm their anger. I am a votary of truth and seeker after it. If I am convinced that I am mistaken I shall admit my mistake (as I always love to do), and shall promptly mend it. It is the word of the scriptures that the mistakes of a votary of truth never harm anybody. That is the glorious secret of truth.

Just a word to friendly critics: I have preserved your letters. I usually reply to my correspondents individually. But the number of letters I have received this time and have been still getting is so large and they are so inordinately long that I cannot possibly reply to them individually. I cannot, I fear, make time even to acknowledge them. Some of the correspondents ask me to publish their letters in *Navajivan*. I hope they will not press the request. I shall try to answer all the arguments that are relevant as well as I can, and hope that that will satisfy them.

I bespeak the indulgence of the reader for this necessary preface. I shall now take up some of the letters before me.

A friend says:

You ask us not to feed stray dogs. But we do not invite them. They simply come. How can they be turned back? It will be time enough when there is a plethora of them. But is there any doubt that feeding dogs cultivates the impulse of compassion and turning them away hardens our hearts? We are all sinners. Why should we not practise what little kindness we can?

It is from this false feeling of compassion that we encourage *himsa* in the name of *ahimsa*. But as ignorance is no excuse before man-made law, even so is it no excuse before the divine Law.

But let us analyse the argument. We cast a morsel at the beggar come to our door, and feel that we have earned some merit, but we really thereby add to the number of beggars, aggravate the evil of beggary, encourage idleness and consequently promote irreligion. This does not mean that we should starve the really deserving beggars. It is the duty of society to support the blind and the infirm, but everyone may not take the task upon himself. The head of the society, i.e., the mahajan or the State where it is well organized, should undertake the task, and the philanthropically inclined should subscribe funds to such an institution. If the mahajan is pure-minded and wise, it will carefully investigate the condition of beggars and protect the deserving ones. When this does not happen, i.e., when relief is indiscriminate, scoundrels disguised as beggars get the benefit of it and the poverty of the land increases.

If it is thus a sin on the part of an individual to undertake feeding beggars, it is no less a sin for him to feed stray dogs. It is a false sense of compassion. It is an insult to the starving dog to throw a crumb at him. Roving dogs do not indicate the civilization or compassion of the society, they betray, on the contrary, the ignorance and lethargy of its members. The lower animals are our brethren. I include among them the lion and the tiger. We do not know how to live with these carnivorous beasts and poisonous reptiles because of our ignorance. When man knows himself better, he will learn to befriend even these. Today he does not even know how to befriend a man of a different religion or from a foreign country.

The dog is a faithful companion. There are numerous instances of the faithfulness of dogs and horses. But that means that we should keep them and treat them with respect as we do our companions and not allow them to roam about. By aggravating the evil of stray dogs we shall not be acquitting ourselves of our duty to them. But if we regard the existence of stray dogs as a shame to us and, therefore, refuse to feed them, we shall be doing the dogs as a class a real service and make them happy.

What, then, can a humane man do for stray dogs? He should set apart a portion of his income and send it on to a society for the protection of those animals if there be one. If such a society is impossible—and I know it is very difficult even if it is not impossible—he should try to own one or more dogs. If he cannot do so, he should give up worrying about the question of dogs and direct his humanity towards the service of other animals.

“But you are asking us to destroy them?” is the question angrily or lovingly asked by others. Now, I have not suggested the extirpation of dogs as an absolute duty. I have

suggested the killing of some dogs as a “duty in distress” and under certain circumstances. When the State does not care for stray dogs, nor does the mahajan, and when one is not prepared to take care of them oneself, then, and if one regards them as a danger to society, one should kill them and relieve them from a lingering death. This is a bitter dose, I agree. But it is my innermost conviction that true love and compassion consist in taking it.

The dogs in India are today in as bad a plight as the decrepit animals and men in the land. It is my firm conviction that this sorry plight is due to our misconception of ahimsa, is due to our want of ahimsa. Practice of ahimsa cannot have as its result impotence, impoverishment and famine. If this is a sacred land we should not see impoverishment stalking it. From this state of things some rash and impatient souls have drawn the conclusion that ahimsa is irreligion. But I know that it is not ahimsa that is wrong, it is its votaries that are wrong.

Ahimsa is the religion of a Kshatriya. Mahavira was a Kshatriya, Buddha was a Kshatriya, Rama and Krishna were Kshatriyas and all of them were votaries of ahimsa. We want to propagate ahimsa in their name. But today ahimsa has become the monopoly of timid [Vaishnavas] and that is why it has been besmirched. Ahimsa is the extreme limit of forgiveness. But forgiveness is the quality of the brave. Ahimsa is impossible without fearlessness.

Cows we cannot protect, dogs we kick about and belabour with sticks, their ribs are seen sticking out, and yet we are not ashamed of ourselves and raise a hue and cry when a stray dog is killed. Which of the two is better—that five thousand dogs should wander about in semi-starvation, living on dirt and excreta and drag on a miserable existence, or that fifty should die and keep the rest in a decent condition? It is admittedly sinful always to be spurning and kicking the dogs. But it is possible that the man who kills the dogs that he cannot bear to see tortured thus may be doing a meritorious act. Merely taking life is not always *himsa*, one may even say that there is sometimes more *himsa* in not taking life. We must examine this position in another article.

Young India, 4-11-1926

IV

Taking life may be a duty. Let us consider this position.

We do destroy as much life as we think is necessary for sustaining the body. Thus for food we take life, vegetable and other, and for health we destroy mosquitoes and the like by the use of disinfectants, etc., and we do not think that we are guilty of irreligion in doing so.

This is as regards one's own self. But for the sake of others, i.e., for the benefit of the species, we kill carnivorous beasts. When lions and tigers pester their villages, the villagers regard it a duty to kill them or have them killed.

Even man-slaughter may be necessary in certain cases. Suppose a man runs amuck and goes furiously about sword in hand, and killing anyone that comes his way, and no one dares to capture him alive. Anyone who despatches this lunatic will earn the gratitude of the community and be regarded a benevolent man. From the point of view of ahimsa it is the plain duty of everyone to kill such a man. There is, indeed, one exception if it can be so

called. The yogi who can subdue the fury of this dangerous man may not kill him. But we are not here dealing with beings who have almost reached perfection; we are considering the duty of the society, of the ordinary erring human beings.

There may be a difference of opinion as regards the appositeness of my illustrations. But if they are inadequate, others can be easily imagined. What they are meant to show is that refraining from taking life can in no circumstances be an absolute duty.

The fact is that ahimsa does not simply mean non-killing. *Himsa* means causing pain to or killing any life out of anger or from a selfish purpose, or with the intention of injuring it. Refraining from so doing is ahimsa.

The physician who prescribes bitter medicine causes you pain but does no *himsa*. If he fails to prescribe bitter medicine when it is necessary to do so, he fails in his duty of ahimsa. The surgeon who, from fear of causing pain to his patient, hesitates to amputate a rotten limb is guilty of *himsa*. He who refrains from killing a murderer who is about to kill his ward (when he cannot prevent him otherwise) earns no merit, but commits a sin, he practises no ahimsa but *himsa* out of a fatuous sense of ahimsa.

Let us now examine the root of ahimsa. It is uttermost selflessness. Selflessness means complete freedom from a regard for one's body. When some sage observed man killing numberless creatures, big and small, out of a regard for his own body, he was shocked at his ignorance. He pitied him for thus forgetting the deathless soul, encased within the perishable body, and for thinking of the ephemeral physical pleasure in preference to the eternal bliss of the spirit. He therefrom deduced the duty of complete self-effacement. He saw that if man desired to realize himself, i.e., truth, he could do so only by being completely detached from the body, i.e., by making all other beings feel safe from him. That is the way of ahimsa.

A realization of this truth shows that the sin of *himsa* consists not in merely taking life, but in taking life for the sake of one's perishable body. All destruction therefore involved in the process of eating, drinking, etc., is selfish and, therefore, *himsa*. But man regards it to be unavoidable and puts up with it. But the destruction of bodies of tortured creatures being for their own peace cannot be regarded as *himsa*, or the unavoidable destruction caused for the purpose of protecting one's wards cannot be regarded as *himsa*.

This line of reasoning is liable to be most mischievously used. But that is not because the reasoning is faulty, but because of the inherent frailty of man to catch at whatever pretexts he can get to deceive himself to satisfy his selfishness or egoism. But that danger may not excuse one from defining the true nature of ahimsa. Thus, we arrive at the following result from the foregoing:

1. It is impossible to sustain one's body without the destruction of other bodies to some extent.
2. All have to destroy some life
 - (a) for sustaining their own bodies;
 - (b) for protecting those under their care; or
 - (c) sometimes for the sake of those whose life is taken.
3. (a) and (b) in (2) mean *himsa* to a greater or less extent. (c) means no *himsa*, and is therefore ahimsa. *Himsa* in (a) and (b) is unavoidable.

4. A progressive ahimsaist will, therefore, commit the *himsa* contained in (a) and (b) as little as possible, only when it is unavoidable, and after full and mature deliberation and having exhausted all remedies to avoid it.

The destruction of dogs that I have suggested comes under (4) and can, therefore, be resorted to only when it is unavoidable, when there is no other remedy and after mature deliberation. But I have not the slightest doubt that refraining from that destruction when it is unavoidable is worse than destruction. And, therefore, although there can be no absolute duty to kill dogs, etc., it becomes a necessary duty for certain people at certain times and under certain circumstances.

I shall now try to take up one by one some of the questions that have been asked me. Some correspondents demand personal replies, and in case I fail to do so threaten to publish their views. It is impossible for me to reach every individual correspondent by a personal reply. Those that are necessary I shall deal with here. I have no right, nor desire, to stop people from carrying on the controversy in other papers. I may remind the correspondents, however, that threats and impatience have no place in a sober and religious discussion.

A correspondent asks:

How did you hit upon the religion of destroying dogs at the old age of 57? If it had occurred to you earlier than this, why were you silent so long?

Man proclaims a truth only when he sees it and when it is necessary, no matter even if it be in his old age. I have long recognized the duty of killing such animals within the limits laid down above, and have acted up to it on occasions. In India the villagers have long recognized the duty of destroying intruding dogs. They keep dogs who scare away intruders and kill them if they do not escape with their lives. These watch-dogs are purposely maintained with a view to protecting the village from other dogs, etc., as also from thieves and robbers whom they attack fearlessly. The dogs have become a nuisance only in cities, and the best remedy is to have a law against stray dogs. That will involve the least destruction of dogs and ensure the protection of citizens.

Another correspondent asks:

Do you expect to convince people by logical argument in a matter like that of ahimsa?

The rebuke contained in this is not without some substance. But I wanted to convince no one. Being a student and practiser of ahimsa, I have had to give expression to my views when the occasion demanded it. I have an opinion based on experience that logic and reasoning have some place, no doubt very small, in a religious discussion.

Young India, 4-11-1926

A friend writes a long letter mentioning his difficulties and pointing out what Jainism has to say to him, a shrawak, in the matter. One of his questions is:

You say that if we can neither take individual charge of roving dogs nor have a pinjrapole for them, the only alternative is to kill them. Does that mean that every roving dog should be killed, although it may not be rabid? Don't you agree that we leave unmolested all harmful beasts, birds and reptiles, so long as they do not actually harm us? Why should the dogs be an exception? Where is the humanity of shooting innocent dogs whenever they are found roving? How can one wishing well to all living beings do this?

The writer has misunderstood my meaning. I would not suggest even the destruction of rabid dogs for the sake of it, much less that of innocent, roving dogs. Nor have I said that these latter should be killed wherever they are found. I have only suggested legislation to that effect, so that as soon as the law is made, humane people might wake up in the matter and devise measures for the better management of stray dogs. Some of these might be owned, some might be put in quarantine. The remedy, when it is taken, will be once for all. Stray dogs do not dropdown from heaven. They are a sign of the idleness, indifference and ignorance of society. When they grow into a nuisance, it is due to our ignorance and want of compassion. A stray dog is bound to take to his heels if you do not feed him. The measure that I have suggested is actuated no less by a consideration of the welfare of the dogs than by that of society. It is the duty of a humanitarian to allow no living being aimlessly to roam about. In performance of that duty it may be his duty once in a way to kill some dogs.

Here is another question:

I agree that the dogs are sure to be killed by man whenever they become a menace to society. But you say, 'To wait until they get rabid is not to be merciful to them.' This means that every dog is potentially rabid and that therefore it should be killed as a matter of precaution. I met a friend from the Ashram who assured me that you did not mean this, and that you had suggested it only as a last resort when dogs had become a menace. This is not clear from your articles. Will you make it clear?

My previous articles and my answer to the first question leave nothing to be cleared. I must explain what I mean when you say that you cannot wait on until the dog gets rabid. Every stray dog is harmful. The harm is [not] confined to cities alone and it must stop. We do not wait until the serpent bites us. The rabies of the dog is concealed in its capacity to bite. A friend has sent me figures of cases of hydrophobia treated in the Civil Hospital, Ahmedabad:

Period	Cases		Total
	from the city	from the district	
Jan. to Dec. '25	194	923	1117
Jan. to Sept. '26	295	695	990

These figures must alarm everyone who is interested in the welfare of the community, especially if he is a humanitarian. I admit that all the cases may not have been of hydrophobia. But it is difficult to say whether a dog is or is not rabid, and many run in fear to the hospital, because most dogs are found to be rabid afterwards. There is only one remedy to relieve them of this fear and it is not to allow dogs to roam about.

I was in England 40 years ago when effective measures were taken to stamp out rabies. There were, of course, no stray dogs there. But even for the dogs which had regular owners, an order was passed that dogs found without collars with the name and address of the owner thereon and without muzzles would be killed. The measure was taken purely in the public interest. Practically the next day all the dogs in London were found to be with collars and muzzles. It was, therefore, necessary to kill only a very few. If anyone thinks that the people in the West are innocent of humanity, he is sadly mistaken. The ideal of humanity in the West is perhaps lower, but their practice of it is very much more thorough than ours. We rest content with a lofty ideal and are slow or lazy in its practice. We are wrapped in deep darkness, as is evident from our paupers, cattle and other animals. They are eloquent of our irreligion rather than of religion.

Here is a third question:

You have different definitions of religion for the individual and for society. But why should not religion in both cases be the same? The ideal ought to be the same for both. That it may be impossible to carry it out is a different matter. For, even in case of the individual, only the occasion can show how far he has been able to carry out his ideal in practice. You yourself have said that your ideal is to save even a cruel animal at the risk of your life, but you could not say what you would actually do when faced by such an animal. There is no reason why society should not similarly have a lofty ideal and leave the individuals free to practise it according to their capacity.

My definition of religion for the individual and for society is the same. The ideal must always be the same, but the practice I have conceived to be different in the case of the individual and the society. Truly speaking, practice differs in case of every individual. I do not know of two men having the same extent of the practice of ahimsa, though their definition of ahimsa is the same. The extent of practice in case of society is the average of the different capacities of its members. Thus, for instance, where a section of the society is milk-arian and the other fruitarian, the practice for the society extends to the use of milk and fruit.

The writer next sets out two Jain doctrines as follows:

Jainism is based on the doctrine of syadvada—manysidedness of reality. As is aptly said: 'No absolute rule is correct; only the relative rule is the correct rule.' Which means that an act which may be described as himsa under certain circumstances may be ahimsa under other circumstances. Man should always use his discrimination in determining his conduct. There are two classes of Jains. Sadhus (the monks) and shrawaks (the laity). Their code of conduct is thus defined:

The sadhu is always non-violent. He may not eat to save himself, may not cook for himself, may not walk even a step for his own purpose—all his activity is for the welfare of the community and it should be as harmless as possible. He has to avoid the 42 infringements laid down in the Shastras. The sadhu is described as nirgrantha—free from bonds. So far as I know there is no sadhu today who can satisfy the definition of a sadhu given above.

The shrawak may not kill or injure any living being, except when it is essential for himself. He is a worldly man and he cannot take his humanity farther than this. So if 20 per cent compassion is expected of the sadhu, 1.25 per cent is expected of the shrawak. If the latter goes beyond the measure expected of him he approaches the state of a sadhu, but as a shrawak nothing more is expected of him.

I knew the substance of this distinction. I am quite conscious that the Jain doctrine is not contrary to the opinion I have expressed in these articles. If the Jains accept the interpretation given above, the opinion expressed by me can be deduced from it. But whether they accept it or not, I humbly submit that my opinion is capable of being, and has been, independently justified.

Young India, 11-11-1926

VI

A friend has sent a long letter containing a number of questions and raising a number of difficulties. He has also sent me his copies of *Navajivan* with profuse marginal notes on this series of articles. Some of his questions have been already answered in these pages. Without reproducing here the rest of his questions, I propose merely to give my answers.

I think I have been considering the whole question quite dispassionately. I do not think I could be accused of any partiality for *himsa* or for my own peculiar views in the matter. My partiality is all for truth which I seek to find out through *ahimsa*. It is my conviction that it cannot be found out in any other way. The question in dispute for me is not whether truth is our goal or not, nor whether *ahimsa* is or is not the only way to it. There is no possibility of my ever doubting these fundamental principles. The question before me is about the practice of these principles. Every day I see fresh aspects opening out to me. There is every possibility of my making mistakes in the practice of *ahimsa* and, though I am taking every precaution possible to avoid them, it is possible that I may err occasionally. Let not friends, therefore,

impute partiality to me when I cannot agree with them. Let them believe me to be unconsciously in error and bear with me. I now proceed to give the answers.

1. The question to solve is not what is hydrophobia and how to treat it.
2. The municipality or the Government will find a remedy not in accordance with ahimsa but with what they conceive to be public interest. The Mahajan can find the right remedy if they are truly non-violent. Government will never subscribe to the absolute principle of non-destruction of animals (dogs in the present case). Municipalities have members belonging to different faiths and different communities. They cannot, therefore, be expected to insist on a non-violent remedy.
3. The duty of finding a non-violent remedy is the Mahajan's. It is a mistake to think that the Mahajan is blameless or helpless.
4. For the purpose of the discussion, I make no distinction between a rabid dog and a man who has run amuck and is in the act of dealing death. Habitual violence is a disease. The habitually violent man goes on in his murderous career only because he is beside himself. Both a rabid dog and a rabid man are worthy of pity. When they are found in the act of injuring others, and when there is no other remedy than to take their life, it becomes a duty to do so to arrest their activity. The duty is all the greater in case of a votary of ahimsa.
5. I have never meant that everyone should own a dog. What I have said is that the dogs should in no case be ownerless. Not that the owned dogs will be immune, but the owners will be responsible for them if they are diseased or get rabies.
6. The ownerless stray dogs are not innocent as lambs. They were never so. Owned dogs are generally so. The purpose of the present controversy is to make all the dogs innocuous.
7. I have never suggested that roving dogs should be killed wherever found. I have suggested enabling legislation in the interest of the dogs themselves. That will make humanly inclined people alive to their sense of duty and they will then either own dogs or find out some other remedy and thus make the existence of stray dogs impossible. In refusing alms to the beggar, the purpose is not to starve him, but to teach him self-help, to make him a man. The duty of killing dogs arises in the circumstances and to the extent I have indicated in the previous articles. To say that it is a sin to extirpate dogs is not to contradict me. For I have never expressed a contrary opinion.
8. It is idle to discuss whether Mr. Ambalal's conduct was or was not proper, or whether my opinion about it was or was not correct. The public is not in full possession of the details of the incident. The broader question of ahimsa is the main issue, and to bring in Mr. Ambalal in the discussion is to cloud the issue.
9. The issue is: Whether, in consonance with the principle of ahimsa, it may be a duty to kill certain dogs under certain circumstances when no other alternative is possible. I submit that it may be and I hold that there cannot be two opinions in the matter. There may be a difference as to whether particular circumstances justify the act. The consolation for a votary of ahimsa lies in the fact that, from his standpoint, such circumstances can only be rare.

10. But I can see one difference of opinion that must for the time being remain. In the letter under consideration as also in many others, I see that there is an instinctive horror of killing living beings under any circumstances whatsoever. For instance, an alternative has been suggested in the shape of confining even rabid dogs in a certain place and allowing them to die a slow death. Now, my idea of compassion makes this thing impossible for me. I cannot for a moment bear to see a dog, or for that matter any other living being, helplessly suffering the torture of a slow death. I do not kill a human being thus circumstanced because I have more hopeful remedies. I should kill a dog similarly situated, because in its case I am without a remedy. Should my child be attacked by rabies and there was no hopeful remedy to relieve his agony, I should consider it my duty to take his life. Fatalism has its limits. We leave things to Fate after exhausting all the remedies. One of the remedies, and the final one to relieve the agony of a tortured child, is to take his life.

But I shall not labour this point. What to my mind is impotence of the votaries of ahimsa is an obstacle to a true understanding of this dharma. I hope therefore that those who differ from me will for the present bear with me.

So much about the thoughtful letter of a friend. I shall now deal with an angry letter. The letter says:

You have been so much under the Western influence that you have learnt to think it proper to kill lower beings for the sake of man. It is better for you to confess your error and apologize to the world. You should have made up your mind in this matter after exhaustless [sic] sifting. Instead, you have passionately taken sides and discredited yourself.

This is the least offensive sentence I have picked up from letters of this type. I submit I have not formed my opinion without much deliberation. It is not an opinion I have recently formed. Neither is it hasty. One should not let one's so-called greatness come in the way of the formation of opinion, otherwise one cannot arrive at truth.

I do not think that everything Western is to be rejected. I have condemned the Western civilization in no measured terms. I still do so, but it does not mean that everything Western should be rejected. I have learnt a great deal from the West and I am grateful to it. I should think myself unfortunate if contact with and the literature of the West had no influence on me. But I do not think I owe my opinion about the dogs to my Western education or Western influence. The West (with the exception of a small school of thought) thinks that it is no sin to kill the lower animals for what it regards to be the benefit of man. It has, therefore, encouraged vivisection. The West does not think it wrong to commit violence of all kinds for the satisfaction of the palate. I do not subscribe to these views. According to the Western standard, it is no sin, on the contrary it is a merit, to kill animals that are no longer useful. Whereas I recognize limits at every step. I regard even the destruction of vegetable life as *himsa*. It is not the teaching of the West.

Argumentum ad hominem has no place in a discussion of principles and their practice. My opinions should be considered as they are, irrespective of whether they are derived from

the West or the East. Whether they are based on truth or untruth, *himsa* or *ahimsa*, is the only thing to be considered. I firmly believe that they are based on truth and *ahimsa*.

Young India, 18-11-1926

VII

Some of my correspondents do not seem to realize the fundamental consideration underlying my suggestion for the destruction of dogs under certain circumstances. Thus, for instance, I have not made the suggestion in a purely utilitarian spirit. The utility to society incidentally accrues from the act, but the principal consideration is the relief of the long drawn-out agony of the creatures whose present condition it is simply impossible for me to tolerate. In the articles in this series, there has not been even the remotest suggestion that man has the right of disposal over the lower animals and that he may, therefore, kill them for his own comfort or pleasure. One of the writers betrays a strange confusion of thought when he says that the characteristic of an exalted soul is that he remains unaffected by the misery around him. He is callous, rather than exalted, who has not learnt to melt at others' woe, who has not learnt to see himself in others and others in himself. Intense longing for the happiness of others was the mother of the discovery of *ahimsa*. And the sage who was the embodiment of compassion found his soul's delight in renouncing his own physical comfort and stopped killing for his pleasure the dumb creation about him.

A correspondent reminds me of the advice given me by Shri Rajchandra when I approached him with a doubt as to what I should do if a serpent threatened to bite me. Certainly his advice was that, rather than kill the serpent, I should allow myself to be killed by it. But the correspondent forgets that it is not myself that is the subject-matter of the present discussion, but the welfare of society in general as also of the suffering animals. If I had approached Raychandbhai with the question whether I should or should not kill a serpent writhing in agony, and whose pain I could not relieve otherwise, or whether I should or should not kill a serpent threatening to bite a child under my protection, if I could not otherwise turn the reptile away, I do not know what answer he would have given. For me the answer is clear as daylight and I have given it.

A studious correspondent confronts me with some verses from a Jain philosopher and asks if I agree with the position taken up in them. One of the verses says:

One should not kill even beasts of prey in the belief that by killing one such, one saves the lives of many.

Another says:

Nor should one kill them out of a compassionate feeling that if they were suffered to live longer they might sink deeper into sin.

The third verse says:

Nor should one kill distressed creatures presuming that one would thereby shorten the length of their agony.

To me the meaning of the verses is clear. And it is this that a particular theory should not be the spring of action in any case. You may commit *himsa*, not in order that you thereby realize in practice a pet theory of yours, but because you are driven to it as an imperative duty. Work which spontaneously comes to one's lot, or action without attachment, in the words of the *Gita*, is the duty of a seeker after *moksha*. Confine your energy to work that comes your way, I conceive the Jain philosopher to say, never seek fresh fields of activity. The verses, to me, define the mental attitude of detachment that should govern one's action in cases where *himsa* seems to be imperative and unavoidable.

But I have arrived at my present views independently of any authority, though originally they may have been drawn from various sources, and I submit that they are in perfect consonance with *ahimsa*, even though they may be proved to be contrary to the teaching of the philosopher.

Young India, 25-11-1926

VIII

Letters on this subject are still pouring in, but I fail to discover in them any new question or any fresh argument advanced. I would therefore ask those who have been thinking on this subject to read this series of articles over and over again. I do so without the slightest hesitation, inasmuch as they are the result not of ideas hastily formed, but of experience of many years. I have presented no new principles, but have tried to restate old principles. I cannot say how far the presentation is correct, but as it represents my honest conviction, and as many friends expect me to solve intricate problems in *ahimsa*, I can only ask them to turn to the series I have been writing. Some of my correspondents wrench my own sentences from their contexts and quote them against me, some quote part of them and omit the most essential remainder.

Thus I have never advocated the extirpation of dogs as a class. On the contrary my suggestions have been made for their betterment. I have repeatedly said that I have suggested the destruction of certain dogs under certain circumstances. Even this may be open to question. If it is, the objector should address himself only to that and nothing more. I continue to be the same votary of *ahimsa* that I was before. I still continue to hold life not only in man and animal, but in plant and flower, as sacred, and yet make use of vegetables and flowers and fruit. Only the spirit behind the use is: 'He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting.' Destruction of dogs, even as that of plant or vegetable, is advised only when it is a matter of imperative duty, and only when it is meant not to sow to the flesh, but to the spirit.

What torments me is the impotence of the votary of *ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* is not impotence. *Ahimsa* is not powerlessness. *Ahimsa* is unconquerable power. We shrink from it as we are dazed by its over-powering lustre. Only very few of us can catch a glimpse of it. *Ahimsa* is the distinguishing characteristic of an untrammelled spirit. It is at the root of a number of

other qualities—discrimination, detachment, penance, equability and knowledge. It is the way of the brave, not of shrinkers. He who would understand ahimsa must understand the meaning of the inevitable *himsa* one sees about oneself. This statement, I know, is liable to abuse. But what is there free from this danger? Is not even God's name turned to the worst account? Have not rivers of blood been made to flow in His name? Have we not worshipped the Devil in His name? But that does not diminish His glory. That does not mean that we shall take His name in a secret corner.

All action is tainted inasmuch as it presupposes *himsa*. And yet we free ourselves from the bondage of action through action itself. This body is the receptacle of sin, and yet we seek to achieve salvation by making of that abode of sin God's own sanctuary. Even so with *himsa*.

And this *himsa*, calculated to take us on the onward path, must be spontaneous, must be the lowest minimum, must be rooted in compassion, must have discrimination, restraint, detachment at its back, and must lead us every moment onward to the path of ahimsa.

I propose to conclude this series with a brief reference by way of illustration to the way in which we are trying to solve the dog problem in the Ashram.

The problem is as old as the Ashram itself. The activity of the Mahajan has made it more serious, and we have put up with it not without reluctance. It is our practice to destroy rabid dogs. Two or three such cases have occurred during the last ten years. Healthy dogs have not been destroyed. They are being refused food. I see that, if the rule is strictly observed we would be all happy, but we cannot do so. Every inmate does not yet realize the necessity of it, and those who do are not sufficiently alive to the observance of the rule. And there are also employees in the Ashram,—how can they be made to observe the rule?

Some dogs we feed, there being no other alternative. Two bitches and their puppies are being maintained at present. The puppies have been kept in cosy boxes or baskets to keep them from cold, and are being given milk and the dams get specially prepared food.

On the other hand, we have applied to the Mahajan to remove stray dogs from here. The request has been accepted, though their cart has not yet come.

I have explained to the best of my light our duty to the dogs. Everyone has to act according to his own light. Let no one learn from me the duty of destruction. He may under certain circumstances permit himself to have recourse to it. I have laid down the limits. Everyone observes and will observe the law according to his own capacity. I have referred to the present practice at the Ashram simply to serve as an illustration of what my opinion means.

The religion of ahimsa consists in allowing others the maximum of convenience at the maximum of inconvenience to us, even at the risk of life. Everyone has to determine for himself the amount of inconvenience he is capable of putting up with. No third party can determine it for him. Religion, even as the soul, is both one and many.

Young India, 2-12-1926